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ABSTRACT

A report on the situation of recent Southeast Asian refugees to the United States describes the experiences and feelings of three young adults in an urban class in English as a second language (ESL). The story is a synthesis of the experiences of many refugees, using information drawn from earlier surveys and interviews. The three students are Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian, and an adult education ESL teacher and a high school ESL teacher are also principal characters in the story. Thirty-one potential points of discussion are noted in the margins and expanded on in an appendix. (MSE)

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Case Study #3

YOUNG ADULTS: 17 - 22 YEARS OLD

Prologue

This case study presents many of the resettlement experiences of young adults between the ages of 17 and 22. All of these students have been living in the United States two years or less. The names are not the true names of the people who had these experiences, but the situations are real.

CAL's Young Adult Refugee Survey (October 1987) and an earlier telephone interview survey, which together included over 375 interviews, provided the background material for this study. Some respondents serve this age group in schools, the work place, voluntary agencies, mutual assistance associations, mental health organizations, and other service agencies. Others are young adult Southeast Asian refugees themselves.

The information was analyzed to identify common experiences among young adult refugees during their first two years of resettlement in the U.S. In the story that follows, the situations of many new arrivals have been combined into our three main characters and the relatives and friends they talk about.

The case study takes place in an adult education English as a Second Language classroom in an American city. The main characters are intermediate level E.S.L. students, but the conversation that they make in E.S.L class in this study reflects a greater skill in English than is typical. This allows easier reading and comprehension of the story.

The classroom is a cheerful place. Brightly-colored maps cover the walls, and there are several bulletin boards full of information important to new arrivals. The teacher's most recent assignment is still on the board: Hand in written assignment titled "My First Two Years in the United States".

The main characters of the story are:

Trinh age 19, from Vietnam. Trinh is an ambitious young woman who learns quickly and has several goals she wants to achieve.

Phouy age 22, from Laos. Phouy's family wanted him to study in high school. Phouy tries this, but changes his plans.

Soun age 18, from Cambodia. Soun tries very hard to fit into the American social life. She has many problems doing so.

Ms. Wasser an E.S.L. teacher in adult education

Ms. Solomon an E.S.L. teacher in a local high school

DISCUSSION OF THE STORY: AT CERTAIN PLACES THROUGHOUT THIS CASE STUDY YOU WILL FIND THE LETTERS "D.P." AND A NUMBER IN THE RIGHT MARGIN. "D" IS FOR THE WORD DISCUSSION; "P" IS FOR POINT. THESE DISCUSSION POINTS PROVIDE BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON IMPORTANT RESETTLEMENT ISSUES THAT MAY BE USED IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS. REFER TO PAGES 25-31 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATED TO EACH DISCUSSION POINT.

MONDAY

Ms. Wasser stood in front of her English as a Second Language students with a stack of papers in her hands. "I'm so proud of this class," she said. "We have studied together for almost one year. You have made very good progress in English. These papers also show me something else. You have observed your new country very closely, and you have learned successful ways to adjust to the many things we do differently here." Some students nodded, others shook their heads, and still others laughed. They laughed because they were recalling their first impressions of the U.S. -- the thousands of cars on the highways, teenagers with purple and blue streaks in their hair, children zooming past them on skateboards, the English that didn't sound like English.

Ms. Wasser continued. "This is your last assignment for this E.S.L. class. Choose one part of the story you wrote last week. On Wednesday, tell that part of your story to the class. That's an oral presentation to the class. It should last three to five minutes. You may use notes. You may not read your presentation, but you may use short notes."

"Are there any questions?" asked Ms. Wasser. No hands went up. "Then spend your class time today preparing your presentation. I will return your papers now and discuss them with you individually."

Trinh was the first student to receive her paper. Coming to adult education was both a joyful and a difficult experience for Trinh. She loved studying but was tired from her day at work.

Trinh was too old to attend high school when she arrived last year. Her parents wanted her to find a job. The family needed more money than her father could earn, and her mother wanted to be home with the children. Trinh could earn more than her mother because her English was better. She had learned some English in Vietnam and had worked very hard in her classes at Bataan.

Their case worker at the voluntary agency referred Trinh to a job as a clerical aide in the adult education program. Many Vietnamese attended classes there and the program needed an interpreter. Trinh was glad she could help her family. She enjoyed being with both Vietnamese and Americans every day. She liked

D.P. # 1
A major
change in
one's life
causes
fatigue ...
See p. 26

the work, but she wanted to get a job that paid more money. Trinh knew that other Vietnamese in the adult education program studied E.S.L. there. After a few months, she talked with one of her co-workers about taking a class in their program. The woman told her about Ms. Wasser's intermediate class. Luckily, it met just after work on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Trinh's long-range plan was to improve her English by taking adult education classes. Then, she hoped to take a computer course at the community college.

Trinh had spent many hours writing her assignment for Ms. Wasser, and she was very happy to see "Excellent" at the top of it. Ms. Wasser had written very few corrections. Trinh knew her parents would be pleased, too.

"But what part of my story do I want to talk about?" wondered Trinh. "Speaking to the class makes me nervous. I must choose something that I know very well. Then I won't forget when I am in front of everyone."

Trinh thought about her months in Bataan. Although she missed her grandparents and her favorite aunt very much, Trinh knew she was fortunate. Many Vietnamese in Bataan were alone. And many knew no English at all. Overall, Bataan was a positive experience for Trinh. She learned so much about the U.S. there and also made some new friends. However, she decided not to talk about Bataan because several of her classmates had also been there.

"Maybe I'll tell about my first impressions of the United States. Oh, how different they were! I understand much more about America now," Trinh thought.

Trinh recalled those first weeks. The sponsor from the church met Trinh's family at the airport. Trinh put out her hand to shake hands. At the same time, the sponsor gave a polite bow! He must have thought Vietnamese greet each other the same as Lao do! It was a little bit embarrassing, but also very touching. Each stranger was trying to please and show respect for the other.

Their sponsors drove Trinh's family to their apartment. People from the church had prepared this new home for them. The apartment already had chairs, tables and beds. And the kitchen had everything they learned about in Bataan -- a stove, a refrigerator,

D.P. #2
Southeast
Asians
who set
goals
succeed
more
quickly in
the U.S. ...
See p. 26

a dishwasher and a noisy garbage disposal. They even had dishes and a few groceries in the cupboards.

Trinh remembered how helpful the church people were. She felt sad when she realized that not all new arrivals were treated so well. Some had to move into crowded homes with their relatives. Others had to find their own apartments which had no furniture or groceries. So they had to buy everything they needed. Still others had to begin life in the U.S. living with Americans.

D.P. #3
Americans
are
helpful
but ...
See p. 26

However, Trinh's parents also understood something else. If they were to succeed in the U.S., they would have to help themselves. They should learn where to shop, how to compare prices, how to pay their bills, how to get a good job, and so on. The people from the church were helpful at first, but they would not always be available.

The first month was very busy for the family. They had medical appointments, school appointments, and job interviews. They didn't have time to think often about Vietnam or to meet their neighbors. Later on, though, Trinh realized how difficult it is to make friends with your neighbors. It seemed like the Americans were never home. They left the house in the early morning and returned after dark. And when they were home they were inside, behind locked doors. They didn't go for walks and talk with each other on the street as Trinh's family did in Vietnam. In fact, the Americans were even strangers to each other. Trinh felt lonely there. "Perhaps," she thought, "some of my American neighbors are lonely too."

There was no local market nearby where Trinh could go to meet her friends. She and her mother did take the bus to a Vietnamese market once a week. They loved the familiar smells there, and they heard favorite Vietnamese songs in the background as they talked with other shoppers in their own language.

The Vietnamese market was one of the few places outside of her home where Trinh felt completely comfortable. After she was earning enough money, she and a few friends would spend hours talking in a local Vietnamese restaurant or talking and watching Vietnamese videos at one of their homes. That was her social life.

Movies were five dollars each -- too much money for now, and she felt uncomfortable at parties because some Vietnamese acted too much like Americans.

D.P. #4
Refugees
need to
choose what
is best for
them.
See p. 26

For Trinh, those early months were the happiest she had been in years. Her family was together and safe in a comfortable apartment. She felt great relief and was optimistic about her future in her new country.

Trinh knew that a presentation about these first impressions would be humorous, and the students would like it. Still, she decided not to talk about those impressions. Instead, she decided to tell about her escape from Vietnam. She began to write down her ideas.

D.P. #5
The early
months are
usually
happy ones,
but later ...
See p. 26

Phouy sat across from Trinh. He was deep in thought when Ms. Wasser returned his assignment. He was remembering his first six months in the U.S. Phouy learned the hard way that an E.S.L. class in adult education was the best place for him to study.

He was eighteen when he escaped from Laos. After participating in the PASS program at Phanat Nikhom, Thailand, he left for the U.S. He was twenty, but his official papers indicated that he was only fifteen! Phouy's parents knew that children could get a free education in the U.S. until they were eighteen or nineteen years old. They wanted him to study and to help the family succeed in America. So they wrote a false age on his documents. He was eager to get to America to start his free education. He also wanted to buy a car, a television and other things he never had in Laos.

D.P. #6
It takes a
long time
before new
arrivals
have the
money to
buy luxury
items.
See p. 26

Naturally, the voluntary agency case manager took this new fifteen year old to register in high school. Phouy was placed in ninth grade. The guidance counselor explained the rules. "Phouy," he said, "here children usually graduate from school when they are seventeen or eighteen." "Children?" thought Phouy. "I'm 21 and he's calling me a child." The counselor went on. "When children are fifteen, they are usually in tenth grade. But everyone needs a certain number of credits to graduate. You will receive one credit for each class you pass. If we place you in tenth grade, you will not earn the ninth grade credits. Our state refugee policies allow children to stay in school until nineteen if they will graduate that year, so ninth grade is better for you. Do you understand?"

Phouy understood. If he followed the usual high school plan, he would be 24 years old when he graduated. Twenty-four! And to do that he must pass everything -- even during this first year.

D.P. #7
There are specific policies in each state on graduation requirements. See p. 27

"O.K., Phouy, you will have three classes a day in E.S.L., and attend mainstream classes in math and science. Physical education, art, and music meet once or twice a week. Please come to my office at the beginning of school tomorrow, and I will take you to your first period teacher."

Phouy tried hard to succeed in school. It was very difficult for him. He had attended only elementary school in Laos. He remembered those days fondly -- all of the little boys in their uniforms, a lot of teasing and laughter, the strict teachers, copying his lessons from the chalkboard and memorizing them at home.

His teachers in the PASS program had explained many of the differences between schools in Laos and the U.S. Yet, there were still many surprises for Phouy during his first weeks of school. The students seemed very rude. They were too friendly to their teachers, and sometimes they even touched them. They were loud with each other. And in the halls... well, it was shocking! Many boys and girls walked in couples and held hands. Some even kissed! Several students wore very modern clothes which looked expensive. It seemed some children wanted to look better than the others. There was laughter here, too, and that helped him feel at home, but there was also tension in the school. Some children seemed afraid and others were anxious about passing their tests. There were some who didn't study and acted tough all the time.

Every time he was with these teen-agers, Phouy realized his real age. They were only fourteen years old! The Asians could tell he was older, but they kept his secret. Most of his classmates were serious. However there were four or five who acted silly or misbehaved in class. "How could they be so disrespectful?" Phouy wondered. In E.S.L. class, Paulo, from Argentina, was a restless boy. He often left his desk or talked and giggled with a few other students. Ms. Solomon, the E.S.L. teacher, stopped teaching many times to say, "Paulo, sit down," or "Paulo, pay attention." A boy from Cuba, Enrique, was always bothering Soun, a Cambodian. Soun wore tight skirts and used a lot of make-up. This attracted Enrique. Almost every day he called her "Doll" and tried to put his

D.P. #8
E.S.L. class is an international experience. See p. 27

arm around her. And Jun, from the Philippines, was always tired. He would sit with his head down on the desk. He rarely listened or did his classwork. Some other students said he was on drugs.

D.P. #9
Very few
Southeast
Asians abuse
drugs.
See p. 27

Phouy felt the biggest gap between himself and the other students in physical education class. This class was more casual. The boys talked, teased and pushed each other around as they changed clothes. They talked about girls, sports cars and music.

Phouy longed for friends his own age. He knew some other Lao men from his neighborhood, but they worked at night when Phouy had free time. His one chance to be with them was at the Saturday soccer games. The Southeast Asians had organized a soccer team in the city league which played other teams made up of South Americans and Europeans as well as Americans. Phouy enjoyed playing these games and relaxing with his team members afterward.

D.P. #10
It's easier to
meet
Americans if
you join ...
See p. 27

The longer he attended high school, the more frustrated Phouy became. He was the eldest son and needed to help his family by earning money. But most of all, he wanted to buy a car. It was difficult depending on the bus for everything. He had already learned, though, that he had to be sixteen to drive and sixteen to get a full-time job. Children could not leave school until the age of sixteen. Phouy felt trapped! He was an adult, and he was ready to take adult responsibility, but he could not. The people at the driver's license bureau and employers would ask to see his papers. His papers said he was not sixteen.

In January, Phouy received his semester grades. He had earned a B in E.S.L., a C in math, and a D in science. The schoolwork had been much more difficult than he expected. He didn't have bilingual teachers, and his mainstream teachers used words that the American children understood. It was hard for Phouy to follow the lessons. After looking at these grades, he realized that he could probably never graduate. He needed to talk with someone.

The next day, Phouy told Ms. Solomon that he wanted to talk with her after school. He trusted Ms. Solomon with his secret, and he knew she could help him if anyone could. After he told her about his age and about his desire to get a job, Ms. Solomon replied, "Oh, Phouy, I have seen so many young people from Galang, Bataan, and Phanat Nikhom who have done the same thing. Some of these older

D.P. #11
There is a
procedure to
follow when
dropping out.
See p. 27

students have settled into school and done well. However, many have not. I know some students who dropped out when they became sixteen. Some found a part-time job in a fast food restaurant; others couldn't get any job at all.

She went on. "Phouy, do you know the phrase *upward mobility*?" "Yes," he said, "but I don't know what it means!" "Let me explain it to you. As I understand it, in Laos, most men stay in the same job all of their lives. Is that true?" "Yes," Phouy answered. "Well, in the U.S. it is different. Do you remember when Jamila, from Afghanistan, gave her talk in E.S.L?" Phouy nodded. "She told us she was surprised that Americans work so hard that both mothers and fathers work full-time, and that even children earn their own money by babysitting, delivering newspapers, cutting lawns or shoveling snow."

D.P. #12
There are several long-term advantages to attending high school even if one will not graduate.
See p. 27

"Well," Ms. Solomon continued, "by working, the children learn a lot about their abilities, their dedication and their interests. Later, after they reach 16, they take part-time jobs in stores, restaurants, offices or at swimming pools. In each job, they learn more about their own talents and preferences. Of course, school helps too. They begin to realize which subjects are easy for them, which are difficult, which are interesting, which are dull. All of these experiences help them decide if they want to be a construction worker, a computer programmer, an electrician, a journalist, a child-care worker, a doctor or whatever."

"Most Americans don't expect to stay in the same job, or even in the same kind of work for their entire lives. *Upward mobility* is the term we use to describe how we start in an easy, low-paying job and then move to a better job, and later to an even better one. 'Better' may mean that we earn more money. It could also mean that we get medical benefits for the first time, or that we have changed to another company which gives promotions. For example, a new employee may start as an apprentice to a printer and then later become a printer. Mobility means *movement*. Upward mobility means we *move up* to better positions in the workplace."

Phouy knew exactly what Ms. Solomon meant. "I see," he said. "Like your student Sophorn who came to our class. She was a clerical aide, then a receptionist, and now she's a secretary!" "That's right," said Ms. Solomon. "Phouy, I believe you have the intelligence and the motivation to get a job and move up. It's too

bad that you are so much older than your family wrote on your papers, but your situation is not hopeless. Let me suggest one plan. High school is the best schooling available to you now. Do you feel you could stay in high school until June? Until then, you could get a part-time job if you want to earn money immediately."

Phouy winced. One reason he told Ms. Solomon his story is that he wanted help in getting away from high school -- fast! "I don't know. I don't want to sit in a classroom all day," he replied.

"I understand your frustrations, Phouy. You're much more mature than these young teenagers. You have a greater responsibility to your family, and you aren't accustomed to the structure of the school day."

Phouy listened carefully. Ms. Solomon was right so far!

"You are an adult, Phouy. Soon you will be thinking about getting married and having children of your own. By staying here just six more months, you will learn more about the school system. You will also learn more about our culture and the cultures of your classmates. Even if you don't do well in your school subjects, you will learn valuable information about this country and how it works. You get information here in school that you won't get anywhere else. Also, you'll better understand what your own children will experience."

Phouy didn't care much about that, but he continued to listen. "Remember, that's only six more months. Then you'll be sixteen on your papers and eligible for adult education. In an adult education program you can take one class or many classes. Most of the students I know found a full-time job and took an E.S.L. class. Adult education classes are offered during the day and evening. So it's easy to choose a class at the time you're not working. E.S.L. classes are usually free, too."

Ms. Solomon also told Phouy about the job training programs in their area.

Phouy's head was spinning. He told Ms. Solomon, "I need to think about all of this. I'll talk with my parents, and we'll make a decision. Thank you for helping me, Ms. Solomon."

"You're welcome, Phouy," said Ms. Solomon. "If you want more information, I have the phone numbers for Ms. Wasser in adult education or Mr. Piluso in the job training program. Oh! And when you apply for your green card, you may change the age on your documents to your actual age if you want."

D.P. #13
The one
opportunity to
legally change
document
information is
when one
applies for a
green card.
See p. 28

While he was thinking about what Ms. Solomon had told him he heard a voice saying, "Well done, Phouy. You're doing much better." It was Ms. Wasser. Now he must stop daydreaming and prepare his speech. He had already decided to talk about his first job.

Soun watched Ms. Wasser hand out each paper. It was very difficult for Soun to write a sentence, and this assignment was to write a whole story! She was nervous about the remarks and corrections she would find on her work. What a change! Just a year ago, Soun didn't care what she did or what happened to her.

Ms. Wasser touched Soun's shoulder as she gave her the paper. "You have good insight, Soun. Let's talk about your paper before your presentation."

Soun was comfortable talking with Ms. Wasser, who had helped her in many ways. However, talking about herself in front of 20 students would *not* be comfortable! Which part of her story would she choose to tell? Soun began to read her paper. She thought about her topic and she looked at Ms. Wasser's comments.

She had started her paper with Bataan. Soun was now eighteen, but she was only ten when she escaped from Cambodia to Thailand with her mother, aunt (her mother's sister) and cousin. After four years near the border and a short time in Phanat Nikhom she and her mother were sent to the Refugee Processing Center in Bataan to prepare for the U.S. For the first time in her young life, Soun felt safe. She also felt very empty because her cousin was not with her. They had experienced so many special times together -- happy ones as small children in Cambodia, horrible ones during the war, scary ones during their escape and some funny ones in the north of Thailand. They were like sisters and were best friends. Soun had relatives in the U.S., but her cousin did not. She probably never would go to America unless Soun and her mother could sponsor her later on.

In her paper, Soun wrote that she liked her classes at Bataan well enough. Each day she and her mother studied English and practiced the words and sentences for class. Every evening they walked to the temple to pray for their loved ones and give thanks for their safety. And every night Soun wrote a letter to her cousin.

Soun read on. Next was her description of life with her relatives. They were distant cousins of Soun's father. Soun did not remember the family, and her mother had not seen them since 1973, two years before they left Cambodia. They had worked for an American company in Phnom Penh. Many of their acquaintances there advised them to flee, so they left the country early in 1975, before the takeover of their city.

She and her mother were excited to see them and grateful that they had sponsored them. However, Soun and her mother's reunion with them was not such a special one. Soun's cousins looked shocked when they saw her and her mother. The cousins were elegant and well-dressed, and seemed embarrassed to walk with Soun. Soun was surprised and hurt. Her mother looked much older and she was not healthy. She had lost some teeth because of a bad diet. She also wore faded clothes. But this was family! Didn't they understand how she and her mother had suffered? Soun believed they did not care about her. She decided they were just doing their duty.

Soun and her mother lived with their cousins, but it was not a comfortable situation. Soun knew they were ashamed of her. They did not listen to her when she spoke. Sometimes they laughed at her. She began to stay in her room when they were home.

Soun liked her school, though. For one thing, it kept her busy. It also kept her away from her cousins' house. And it was the one place she could be with people her own age.

Soun smiled as she read her first impressions of American girls. At first she felt very different from the other girls in her ninth grade classes. She wanted to be friends with American girls. They could help her learn English more quickly and learn more about teenage life in the U.S. She listened to their conversations in the halls and in the rooms before classes began. There seemed to be many different groups. Some girls talked about their homework and worried about their grades. Others always fixed

D.P. #14
Most new
arrivals
interact only
with people
from their
own country.
See p. 28

their make-up and giggled about boys. There was a group of athletic girls who stayed after school every day to play basketball. Another group seemed to hate school. They smoked in the girls' room, and often went outside instead of going to class. In class, some girls were polite and others were rude to the teacher. Some never listened. Soun was surprised to find out in social studies class that they knew almost nothing about Asia, and they couldn't even find Cambodia on a map.

Soun decided to use the next part of her story for her presentation to the class. It would be difficult to admit how badly she had behaved, but she decided that it might help the parents in her class to know about some of the stress young people feel.

All of Ms. Wasser's students looked over their papers carefully. Some talked with Ms. Wasser about the suggestions she wrote on their papers. Soun waited until last. Ms. Wasser complimented her again on her mature understanding of things that had happened to her. Then they worked together on how to say it correctly in English.

This was the first time the students would make a speech in front of the class. They had talked together in pairs many times but never made speeches. Everyone was a little nervous. They concentrated more in class today than ever before! Before anyone had finished preparing his/her talk, it was time to go home.

WEDNESDAY

The students entered the class reluctantly and without their usual chatter. Ms. Wasser knew they were scared, and so she explained why she had made this assignment. "Good evening, students. We have had many group discussions in class this year. You have learned about some of the customs of Afghanistan, Eastern Europe, Eritrea, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. You have laughed together about some of the strange things we do here in the U.S.! I have read your journals--the thoughts which you have written all year for homework. In those journals, you have told me about your countries and the many adjustments you have made. Although most of you come from different parts of the world, your early experiences in the U.S. are very similar. Many of your needs, fears, and successes are the same."

"I have asked you to speak today about your own resettlement because I want you to practice English, of course. But you will also be helping each other. Each of you has had very valuable experiences. As you listen to each presentation, you may hear thoughts that you have had. You will also hear how other people have responded to a problem that you may have had or might have later on. You will realize again that you are not the only one who has the difficult challenge of succeeding here. You will know that thousands of immigrants all over the U.S. share your feelings, your frustrations, your laughter, your tears."

"We'll draw numbers from this box. Whoever gets number one will be first."

Trinh drew number 4, Soun drew 7, and Phouy got number 16. Phouy relaxed because he knew he would not speak today. A young woman from Afghanistan spoke first. She told the students about her desire to delay marriage until she got enough education to find a good job. She described the pressure her parents put on her to get married and have children. Ms. Wasser encouraged discussion after the presentation. Several of the women said they felt the same pressure, and they were from countries as different as Laos and Ethiopia! They were also concerned that some of their cultural traditions would be lost. Still, they wanted to convince their parents that it is possible to find a reasonable balance between their native culture and the new one. It was painful to challenge the traditions of their native land, but as Rudolf, a man from

Eastern Europe said, "We are the only generation who will know both cultures. Our children will be born here. They will have all of their schooling here. We must open ourselves to some of the practices in our new country so our children will not reject us or our beliefs. Yet we must teach them of the uniqueness of our heritage and make them proud of it."

A young man from Hungary spoke next about prejudice. He explained that white immigrants experience prejudice, too. People insulted him about his accent and his clothes when he first arrived. This led to a lively discussion. The class talked about why people are prejudiced and how they show it.

The student with number 3 said he didn't prepare his speech. Ms. Wasser asked him to be ready on Friday. Then it was Trinh's turn. She had practiced her speech many times in her bedroom last night, on her lunchbreak at work today and again just before class. She was confident, but still very nervous. When she heard Ms. Wasser say, "Four," all her thoughts went out of her head! She couldn't remember anything. As she slowly walked to the front of the room, her opening words came back to her. Soon, she was no longer nervous. She was involved in telling her own story.

My family left Vietnam the same as many others did -- at night, in an old boat, with no luggage, and very scared. I want to tell you what I learned from that escape.

I was only 10 years old, but I felt like a criminal. Before we left, my mother surprised me. She said people might stop us on the way to the boat. She made me practice lies to answer questions they could ask us. My mother had always punished us when we didn't tell the truth, but she explained that this was an unusual situation. We were doing it to protect ourselves. On our long, secret walk to the boat, she made me hide when she heard a noise.

Trinh continued. She gave examples of things she remembered -- the gold her father had given the guide, the man at the dock who stole their few belongings, the fear of being caught that night.

At that young age I realized that not all people are good. Every country has its good and bad people. The monk had

D.P. #15
Cultural
preservation
helps answer
the adolescent
question "Who
am I?".
See p. 28

D.P. #16
Many
Southeast
Asians have
concerns
about racism
and prejudice
in the U.S.
See p. 28

taught me that people should not be cruel to any creature, but so many people were being cruel to us. We did nothing to them, yet they hit my father and stole our things.

Now that I am older, and my family is settled here, I have more time to think about our escape and how it affected me. I learned to be careful. I don't trust people easily. I have learned more about the Vietnam War. I understand that some of our leaders tried their best, but others were not honest. I believe that many Americans wanted to help us, but many others did not respect our people. I also understand why we had to leave my homeland, and why I felt like a criminal. By lying to our countrymen and escaping illegally, we were doing something wrong, "wrong" according to the government. For our own safety and well-being we became dishonest. Now we are happy to be free -- free to tell the truth again.

Trinh concluded. When I left my country, I did not understand about our people, our special ways of life, our values. And I had some experiences I was too young to understand.

I am grateful to my family for bringing me to the U.S. We have opportunities here for a good education and a safe life. But how I miss Vietnam, the Vietnam as I knew it as a little girl. I don't want to go back because I know it is a different place now. However, I do want to help keep the Vietnamese traditions. We do this at home. We speak Vietnamese, tell favorite stories to the younger children, and sing native songs. I want to do more. You already know I want to work with computers, but in my free time I hope to help our mutual assistance association. They are going to start a week-end school -- a place where Vietnamese can find our best books and films, can listen to our music, and can study about our history, language, arts and dances.

Trinh had not planned her closing line, "Perhaps I can be part of the bridge between the American and Vietnamese cultures. I hope to help younger Vietnamese understand and be proud of our culture, as Rudolf said."

D.P. #17
Young children need to believe that their parents can control events.
See p. 28

D.P. #18
While in their native countries, many young adults observed American soldiers.
See p. 28

D.P. #19
People react differently in a threatening situation.
See p. 28

D.P. #20
It is normal to want to return to your native land.
See p. 29

Trinh had noticed nods by several students when she talked about learning adult lessons at a young age. During the discussion period several students told similar stories.

Before long it was Soun's turn. Hers was the last presentation of the day. She thought the earlier speeches were very good, and worried that hers would not be interesting, or that the students wouldn't understand her English.

Phouy watched her go to the front of the room. He couldn't believe the difference in Soun. She had looked and acted so tough when they were in Ms. Solomon's room together. Now she dressed modestly and smiled more.

Soun looked at all those faces, took a deep breath, and quietly began to speak.

Many of you know I was in high school and I'm only 18 now. I guess I'm the youngest one in this class. Everyone has some difficulties adjusting to the U.S. and I am having some, too. Many of you have children. Maybe I can help you understand their school experience a little better if I tell you about mine.

My very first day of school I was so embarrassed. I was the last one to get into classes because I couldn't find the rooms. Everyone looked toward the door when I walked in. No one thought to help me find the next one, though.

At lunch, a whole table of kids pointed at me and laughed when I threw my milk carton and other trash away. I didn't know you are not supposed to throw the whole tray into the garbage can! I wanted to become invisible and get out of there.

I didn't get much help or advice those first few days. I thought high school would be like Bataan, where teachers and students know what you need and help you. Here, they didn't. School personnel are very busy. They don't usually notice that you need something, but if you ask for assistance, they will usually do their best to help you.

D.P. #21
Sometimes
help is
available.
See p. 29

There were other Cambodian students at school. I tried to talk with them, but they were not friendly. They had been here a while, so maybe they were embarrassed to be with me. I still had a traditional haircut and simple clothes. Or perhaps they didn't want to remember that their English was as bad as mine when they first arrived. I don't know, but I couldn't make friends with them.

D.P. #22
New arrivals
expect help
from their
compatriots.
See p. 29

I was not happy at home. I missed my cousin in Thailand so much, and I was very lonely in school, too. One girl in my physical education class reached out to me. Her name was Bridget. I was so glad to have someone to talk with. Soon I was spending a lot of time with her. I wanted to fit in, so I began to wear tight skirts, and sweaters, and make-up just like she did. Before long I had a punk hairstyle like hers, and I copied her slang, too.

My mother tried to stop me. She didn't want me to act like the American girls. "You don't understand." I said, "If I'm going to make it in America, I have to act American." We had some bad arguments, but she couldn't control me. When I came home after school, she was out working. My mother didn't like me to stay after school or meet Bridget on weekends.

D.P. #23
Children
learn more
quickly about
U.S. language
and customs,
but not
childrearing.
That's the
parents' role.
See p. 29

I began to lie about where I was going. When I wanted to meet Bridget, I would tell my mother there was a special class at school. She didn't understand the school system and she wanted me to succeed in school, so that was a good excuse. I didn't succeed though; my grades were very low. My mother didn't know because I didn't show her my report card.

D.P. #24
Some young
adults
manipulate
their parents.
See p. 29

I began staying out late with Bridget, and was very tired at school. Ms. Solomon, my E.S.L. teacher, talked with me. She asked if anything was wrong. I lied and told her my mom was sick. I pretended I was taking care of her at night.

I knew inside that I was getting myself into trouble, but I wanted to fit in so badly. I thought Bridget was helping me do that.

One night I went to a party without Bridget. She was sick, but I didn't want to stay home. Tom, her boyfriend, was there. He had been drinking beer. "Hello, Sounie," he said. "Wanna dance?" As we were dancing, he held me closer and closer. I didn't know what to do. I had never even danced a slow dance with a boy before. Tom was too close and he was Bridget's boyfriend. "Hey, knock it off," I said and tried to pull loose. "C'mon Sounie, Don't play innocent with me. You wear those clothes, and all that make-up. Live up to your image, baby."

D.P. #25
Sometimes
young adults
don't
understand
the subtle
messages they
convey
through dress
and behavior.
See p. 29

I couldn't believe it. I ran out of the party and caught a bus home. All the way across town I kept hearing "image, image". When I got to my own place, everyone was asleep. I was so glad! I didn't want to wake my mother, so I slept on the couch.

I hardly slept all night. The next morning I tried to hide my anger and confusion from the family. When I got to school, Bridget was waiting for me at our usual place, but she looked different. Her arms were folded in front of her and she had a mean look on her face.

"Soun, how could you do that to me?", she yelled. "Making a pass at Tom. I thought you were my friend. That's the end of our friendship."

"What? Bridget, let me explain," I answered. But she just said, "Tom did all the explaining I need to hear," and she walked away.

I was shocked. I wanted to run somewhere to be alone, but where? I waited for the school bell to ring. After the students went inside, I walked into the woods behind the school. I sat down and cried and cried. How could my new friend accuse me? Why wouldn't she listen to me?

I must have been there for hours. I was sad and confused. I kept thinking about Cambodia -- how I watched them take my father away; how he didn't fight, just went along with them; how my mother and I loved each other then; how we fought and grew apart in the U.S. I also realized that after

all my effort, I still didn't fit in. Tom insulted me; Bridget was not a real friend. I felt so alone.

As usual there were many bottles in the woods. I picked up one of them and smashed it against a tree. I grabbed a piece of the broken glass. Thinking about the many times I had heard the words "an honorable way out," I scratched the jagged glass across my wrist.

D.P. #26
There are
alternatives
to suicide.
See p. 30

Ms. Chim, our bilingual aide at school, noticed I was absent. According to school rules, she phoned my home to check on me. When my cousin told her I was not sick and I had left in time for school, she asked a hall monitor to help look for me. Bridget told her that she had seen me at school. When they found me, I was quite weak. Ms. Chim called an ambulance and accompanied me to the hospital.

At that moment, I was not happy they had found me. A social worker came to visit me in the hospital and I have talked with her many times since. She and Ms. Chim are helping me understand why I had those problems. They told me that almost all teenagers feel confused at times. Even children who were born here have difficulties with their families and friends when they reach their teen years.

D.P. #27
Adolescence is
a difficult
time for teens
in most
western
countries.
See p. 30

I was too ashamed to go back to high school. Ms. Chim told me about adult education. My mother made me take the evening class, so we have time together during the day now. We hurt each other so much before. Now we're trying to help each other get used to this new country.

I'm still deciding what I want to do after this E.S.L. class. I'll probably get a job, so my mother and I can afford to leave our cousins' house.

The last thing I want to say is to the parents. If your children begin to talk back to you, stop talking at home, try to stay away from home, or change in other ways, talk with them. Help them understand what's happening at school and at home. They may seem to be strong and independent, but they probably have a mixture of feelings -- a desire to do what they want, a loyalty to you, a need for guidance. If you

can't talk with them, find someone else to help -- a relative, a monk, a teacher, a friend."

In the discussion period, one of the mothers told about her son's early school years in the U.S.

"I am from Honduras," she began. "My son is also in high school. He had problems, but they are different from yours, Soun."

"Carlos is a very determined young man. He studies very hard. He has been in school three years now and is making excellent grades. Yet, for a while he was not happy at school. Several students in his classes called him "brain" and "bookworm". Instead of respecting him for his good work, they tried to make him ashamed of being a good student."

"Carlos is also good at playing sports. Some of the boys in his physical education class saw him playing basketball. They saw how well he handled the ball and asked him to try out for the school team. Now he is good friends with some of these boys."

"Carlos learned that not all Americans who teased him are mean. In a way, they were reaching out to him. They had noticed he was smart. Maybe they were trying to find out if he had other qualities which would make him a good friend. He knows now that some teens bully others to make themselves feel more important, but others may just have an awkward way of trying to get to know you."

"Yes," said a Vietnamese classmate, "and there's another side to this, too. Southeast Asians have been coming to America for almost 13 years now. Early arrivals have made a good image for us. Many students have had the best grades in their classes and many others have made all A's and B's."

"However, for some students this is not a good thing. Our neighbor's child was a good boy. He sings well and loves music. He didn't go to school in Vietnam until after the war, so school was difficult for him here. He was earning C's, D's and F's. Other teenagers teased him about his grades. They

pressured him to get all A's and B's as so many of the other Vietnamese do."

"He thought he was a failure. He felt ashamed and thought people were disappointed in him. Last month, he ran away. His parents are trying to find him, but they are losing hope."

D.P. #28
Some
runaways are
safe, but ...
See p. 30

Other parents also talked about their children's school experiences, too. Soun was happy that people really listened to what she had said. She walked back to her desk. Class was over.

MONDAY

Phouy finally gave his speech two classes later. He began with a question.

How many of you believe I am 16? (A few people raised their hands. All of the Southeast Asians laughed!) I tried to be sixteen in high school last year, but I am twenty-two. When I realized I would never graduate, I talked to my high school E.S.L. teacher and my parents. My parents had big dreams for me. I am sorry I couldn't make their dreams come true, but I can still help them. And, who knows? Maybe later I can find the time to study hard and pass the G.E.D.

D.P. #29
This
alternative is
difficult for
recent
arrivals.
See p. 30

Now I am working. It is possible for me to work full-time and also study English. Sometimes, I am very tired and think I cannot make it to Ms. Wasser's class. Once in a while I do stay home from class to sleep, but most of the time it is possible to work and study, too.

I want to tell you about my job. My high school counselor helped me get this job at the big meat packing factory here in our city. I have been there almost one year and have received one pay raise already. I also get medical benefits, sick leave, and two weeks of vacation every year. I get a special discount on our meat, so our family eats very well! I like it there now, but the first few weeks were very difficult.

I had to get up at 5 a.m. because the factory was far from my home. It took more than an hour to walk to the bus stop, catch the first bus, transfer to the second bus, and finally arrive at work. I got on the wrong bus more than once!

Lucky for me, my foreman understood my problem. He was patient about my lateness until I learned the routine. After that, though, I lost pay if I was late. "Time is money", my boss would say.

My first day of work, I was scared, but excited too. I thought I knew a lot about a factory because my friends in Phanat Nikhom would tell me about their Work Orientation

classes and the factory simulation there. Then I would tell them about my PASS experiences. We learned a lot from each other, but I still had much more to learn! I bet they did too.

In the beginning, rules were a big problem for me. People helped me understand the rules in our manual -- don't leave the machines on when you leave, be at work on time, break is for 15 minutes only. But the unwritten rules are hard to find out about. For example, I had to learn not to answer the foreman's phone if it rang while I was near his desk. I am still learning how to get along with each of my co-workers, which ones are the serious workers, which ones like to tease, who I could trust and who are the group's unofficial leaders.

I was happy to see some other Lao at work and to know I could speak my own language sometimes. But many Americans are suspicious when we do that. They think we're being unfriendly. Some even think we're talking about them!

It is very hard to get to know the American workers. I have a few American friends now, but I don't see them after work or on weekends. I remember when I first talked with Don and Bill. On my first break, they welcomed me to our work group. I could not understand one word. Later, I learned that Don came from Georgia and Bill grew up in Boston, Massachusetts. It sounded like they spoke two different languages!

Other co-workers were not so friendly. Some even played tricks on me. One day one of them told me it was the foreman's birthday, and that it is an American custom to say, "Good morning, sir. You look lousy today." I liked the foreman, and I wanted him to have a happy birthday. So I said it to him. He looked shocked! I didn't know what I had said, but I knew it was an insult. I never trusted that co-worker again. That incident helped me learn who might be a friend and who would never be.

When I had been working about six months, my friend Don told me, "Phouy, you learned this job quickly, and you're

D.P. #30
It takes years
and years to
master a
second
language.
See p. 30

doing very well. You could get better jobs here if you tried. Why don't you talk with the foreman about it?"

I was too embarrassed to ask the foreman to promote me, but one day he surprised me. He called me into his office and said, "You're doing very good work here, Phouy. You follow the rules, and you exceed your quotas. You could move up in this company."

I was happy about that. He also said, "It's easy to get a job with only a little English background, but you need to understand more to move up the ladder. Why don't you study some English at night? In the next job, you would have to speak English with all of your workers and you would have some paperwork, too."

"I took his advice and came to this class. We are all writing papers and making speeches in here. Maybe my English will soon be good enough for me to get a small promotion."

Ms. Wasser called on a few students who told about the adjustments they had to make at work. Another asked Phouy if he had any problems learning his job. Phouy laughed. He told about the mistakes he made during the first few weeks. "My co-workers explained things so fast. It was hard to remember it all. But I watched them carefully. Before long, it became an easy routine.

Three more students spoke, then Ms. Wasser ended the class by saying, "We have only two more sessions together. Wednesday we will work. Friday we will have a party to celebrate your success in this class and to say our farewells."

Once again there were many "Goodbyes" Some of Ms. Wasser's students would see each other in the advanced class, but none of them would study again with this special teacher who helped them learn so much about English, the U.S. and their own resettlement experiences.

D.P. #31
Most
promotions
require extra
work.
See p. 30

D P #1

In the early months of resettlement many new arrivals are physically and mentally exhausted at the end of the school or work day. They experience pressure from listening to English all day and from facing so many changes in the daily routine. The smells, the pace, the rhythms, and the customs are very different. In new situations it is normal to be unable to accomplish as much as usual.

D P #2

Many new arrivals come to the U.S. with no particular goals or long-range plans. They have met their goal of safely leaving their country. Often once that goal has been achieved little thought has been put into planning their future.

It is advantageous to arrive with a survival strategy for the early months and years in the U.S. -- specific goals and ideas on how to take the first steps to achieve them. Those who receive the help of a voluntary agency frequently are encouraged to develop a one-year plan soon after arrival. Refugees need to understand this concept and have realistic plans in mind before they arrive.

D P #3

Southeast Asian refugees have been coming to the U.S. in large numbers since 1975. In the early years, most refugees were sponsored by people in churches or community organizations who were eager to help. As with most "projects", enthusiasm decreases as time goes on. Many of these churches and civic groups have turned to other good works, and most refugees are now sponsored by members of their own family or come through the Orderly Departure Program. Unaccompanied minors live in foster homes, usually with American Whites.

D P #4

Young adult refugees respond to their new surroundings in a variety of ways. Some choose not to become involved with Americans or the American culture. Others make friends with peers from their native country. They seek advice on how to maintain the familiar native customs, while also participating in American activities. Many others seem to reject their own background and immerse themselves in the new culture by spending most of their time with Americans, joining the groups of their American peers, and Behaving more like Americans. Young adults need to be aware of these different behavior patterns, how people perceive them, and the choice that is best for them.

D P #5

Most new arrivals feel optimistic and secure for their first six months or year in the U.S. After that time, some realize that they will not be able to graduate from high school. Others find out that the jobs they can get do not pay enough money for them to live comfortably. At this point they may become depressed and not know what to do. School counselors and job counselors can be of great help. More refugees need to know the kinds of assistance available to them in the U.S. and how to make use of these forms to help.

D P #6

It takes years to save enough money to buy even a used car in the U.S. Many Southeast Asians have become discouraged because they did not understand how expensive items are or how long it takes to save enough money to buy them. Before that, of course, they need to have good skills in order to get a job which pays enough salary for them to be able to

save money. New arrivals can expect to work for a few years simply to earn enough money to buy essential items.

DP #7

Each state establishes its own graduation requirements. Most states require approximately 20-22 credits to graduate; 1 per course that meets each day and 1/2 per course that meets fewer times each week. Many states also require taking a state-wide examination, called a Minimum Competency Test. Students must pass reading, writing, and math on this exam. Some states include social studies as well.

DP #8

E.S.L. classes in the U.S. usually include students from many countries. There are refugees, immigrants and the children of diplomats and other international visitors. This is also true, to a lesser degree, in mainstream classes. New arrivals must learn to interact with young adults of several national, racial, ethnic, religious and economic groups. Many teenagers lose their own identity by trying to meet the different expectations of various groups.

DP #9

A very small percentage of the Southeast Asian population uses or sells drugs. However, the problem is increasing.

DP #10

It is not difficult to meet Americans. Virtually every city in the U.S. has organized sports, music and drama. Businesses and recreational centers organize leagues for baseball, softball, rugby, bowling, soccer and other sports. City governments often support orchestras, chamber music or choral groups. In addition, every school child has the opportunity to participate in sports, music, drama, a variety of clubs and other extra-curricular activities. Few Southeast Asians participate in these activities. Most of those who do report that it helps them meet people, make friends, learn English and learn more about American culture. Furthermore, millions of Americans volunteer their services to tutor, help the sick, support a political candidate or help the community in hundreds of other ways. Participating in these activities is often a natural and comfortable way to become part of a larger group, part of the mainstream. Americans are "joiners." They participate in many kinds of activities and respect others who pursue their own talents to become well-rounded individuals.

DP #11

In the U.S., dropping out of high school can have long-term effects on a person. Most employers assume that the dropout is lazy, unmotivated and troublesome. In other words, an employer usually believes it is a risk to hire a dropout. Students should be sure that their reasons for dropping out are carefully recorded on their school record, especially if they are positive reasons, such as seeking full-time work to help the family financially, but planning to study again later. People who dropout because they need to earn money for the family should find ways to demonstrate their ambition and capabilities to their employers.

DP #12

Some young adult Southeast Asians decide to go to high school even though they realize that they are too old to meet all of the requirements for graduation. They believe that a year in a high school is worth the time because they will learn valuable information about their

new country and its people. Of course, they learn English in high school better and more quickly than anywhere else because they hear it and must speak it all day long.

D P #13

When the refugee applies for a green card, it is possible to request a correction in one's age, as well as a change in the order of one's family and given names.

D P #14

Young adult refugees respond to their new surroundings in a variety of ways. Some choose not to become involved with Americans or American culture. Others make friends with peers from their native country. They seek advice on how to keep the familiar native customs, while also participating in American activities. Many others seem to reject their own background and immerse themselves in the new culture by spending most of their time with Americans, joining the groups of their American peers and behaving more like Americans. Young adults need to be aware of these different behavior patterns, how people perceive them and the choice that is best for them.

D P #15

Young adults sometimes refuse to speak their native language, observe native holidays or practice native customs. This is often a signal of an identity crisis. Counseling may help the person through the difficult period of discovering how to keep the essence of a Southeast Asian and still adapt well in the U.S.

D P #16

Prejudice and racism are discussed detail in Issue 12 of CAL's Information Update (Fall 1987.)

D P #17

Mental health studies show that children under age 10 tend to believe that their parents or other close adults can control events, that they know everything and that they are infallible. If circumstances expose the child to adult vulnerability, the child's development may be challenged. Thousands of Southeast Asians witnessed events in which their parents were not in control -- sent to re-education camp, taken prisoner, beaten and so on. As a result these children, who are now young adults, may have trouble making decisions, may have fears of adults, may find it difficult to trust other adults or may be unable to handle adult responsibilities well. Professional counseling can be a significant help.

D P #18

Many Southeast Asians have very strong feelings about the American role in the Vietnam War. Living in the U.S. complicates their ability to resolve these feelings.

D P #19

When people's lives are in danger, they react according to the rules of survival rather than to the rules of their accepted moral code. Many Southeast Asians in the U.S. have strong guilt feelings about their behavior in post-war Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Perhaps they reported a friend, stole some food or did something else they would not have done under normal circumstances. They may need help in understanding that behavior and putting it in its proper context.

D P #20

Many refugees want to help their native country or still dream of returning there. Until they are able to accept the U.S. as their new country and not just as a temporary haven, they will probably not be able to adjust well here.

D P #21

Some schools, assign a "buddy" to a new student. This person accompanies the new student to each class for the first few days, and answers questions. If the school has bilingual counselors, bilingual aides, or ESL teachers, they usually offer a great deal of help during the first few days. However, many schools simply give new students their schedules and the students must find their own way.

D P #22

Earlier arrivals may or may not help new refugees. The pattern seems to be that earlier arrivals help more recent arrivals during their first six months in the U.S. After that, earlier arrivals usually spend time with their own friends and focus on their own success in school or at work.

D P #23

It is very important for parents to be parents -- to establish rules and enforce them, to set limits for the child. Even though the young adults are assuming some adult roles (interpreter, representative for the family, "teacher" about the new culture), they need to know that someone is in charge, someone cares, someone is helping them adapt to their new culture, but also showing them how the differences do or don't fit into their own traditions. At the same time, parents need to allow their children some freedom to try a few new behaviors. The children are thrust into the new culture, and they need to test the best way to feel comfortable in it.

This is a difficult balance to achieve and a hard task for parents. However, most young Southeast Asian dropouts and those in trouble with the law, have no strong parent figure at home.

Some parents go to the other extreme -- they physically abuse their children if they disobey. This is against the law. Children learn about this law early in their school experience (or at the Refugee Processing Center). Some young adults report their parents to a social worker. Others began to act in more rebellious ways. A few even run away from home.

D P #24

Some teenagers purposely deceive their elders. They use their role of interpreter for their own advantage. For example, when they translate about school issues, they may translate part of a message, but also withhold information about such things as report cards, parent conferences or absenteeism. It is important for parents to talk with other parents or with bilingual school personnel to learn about the system. If the children succeed in manipulating information, they usually lose respect for their parents and often practice deviant behavior as well.

D P #25

This is a common result of imitating Western behavior. It is easy for young adults to wear the same style of clothes, wear make-up or use slang. But it is not easy for them to

understand that those behaviors give a particular message to people around them. For example, most new arrivals live in low-income neighborhoods. If they use the language of that area, throw bottles, break windows, litter, etc., as many people there do, other groups will think they are tough and bad-mannered. New arrivals may not know that other groups have different goals, values and habits. Young adult refugees should observe many groups before they decide with which group they would like to associate.

D P #26

Many young adults, as young children, witnessed suicide in their native countries. Family members or friends of the family may have ended their lives as an honorable way out of their threatening war-time situations. Young adults need to be aware that there are other alternatives. Bilingual counselors (at school) and other counselors are trained to help understand the reasons for their problems. They also help individuals to develop a plan for solving their problems and help them carry out their plan. Furthermore, new arrivals should know that, with time and help, feelings of helplessness and deep pain can be overcome.

D P #27

Many teenagers and young adults, whether refugees or native-born Americans, experience difficulties and stressful situations. It can be a message of hope for young refugees to deal with each problem as it arises and not to think of all problems as "refugee problems."

D P #28

Most Southeast Asian runaways go to a relative's home. In large cities, some Vietnamese are lured into Vietnamese gangs. Gang leaders recognize youth who are troubled and lonely. They pretend to care about the young person who then feels a loyalty to do what he is told.

D P #29

Very few refugees pursue the G.E.D. It is a difficult exam for recent arrivals who have had little schooling.

D P #30

The most common problem cited in CAL's Young Adult Refugee Survey for new arrivals aged 17-22 was English. Young adults often arrive optimistic that they learned enough English in the Refugee Processing Centers to start off well in the U.S. Hearing regional accents, sophisticated vocabulary, vocational jargon and rapid speech may cause them to lose confidence in themselves and their ability to adjust. It is important for them to understand that learning any second language takes time and that each facet of their lives will require learning additional vocabulary. For example, they will need different vocabulary with their peers than with their employer or their priest (monk, minister).

D P #31

Most new arrivals are able to get an entry-level job with minimal English skills. However, to get a better job with the same employer or to move to a better job in another company, additional English skill is usually required. If new arrivals are too busy or tired to study English (in addition to working), they need to seek opportunities to practice speaking and reading. Perhaps they could speak regularly with co-workers during breaks and at lunch, or set aside time at home to speak English with their children.